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**Government of the District of Columbia**



**Metropolitan Police Department**

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Testimony of  
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Chief of Police

***Public Oversight Hearing on  
Police Service Area (PSA) Boundaries and the  
“District of Columbia Community Protection Act of 2005,” Bill 16-241***

Committee on the Judiciary  
Phil Mendelson, Chair  
Council of the District of Columbia

October 5, 2005

Council Chamber  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

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Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee, staff and guests ... thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's public oversight hearing. As is customary, the text of my prepared remarks is being posted on the MPD website: [mpdc.dc.gov](http://mpdc.dc.gov).

I want to first acknowledge the work of the Committee and the Council in your oversight role for enhancing community policing and neighborhood safety in our city. I especially want to thank you for the opportunity we had to meet with Councilmembers earlier this year to provide a detailed overview and update on our Policing for Prevention strategy. And I look forward to continuing that dialogue today and into the future.

My testimony today provides an update on the ongoing evolution of Policing for Prevention in the District of Columbia – in particular, our experiences following the realignment of the Police Service Area, or PSA, boundaries in the spring of 2004. I will also offer some comments on the Community Protection Act of 2005, which is now before the Committee.

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As you know, the PSA concept was first introduced in the District of Columbia in June 1997, about a year before I was appointed Chief of Police. During the first several months of my tenure, our Department focused heavily on putting some vision, direction and substance behind the PSA concept. The result was our comprehensive strategy of community policing, what we call Policing for Prevention. In the ensuing years, we have continued to evaluate, refine and improve upon our strategy. For example, we instituted the innovative “Partnerships for Problem Solving” community training program, to better support neighborhood partnerships. In 2002, to strengthen the focused law enforcement aspect of our strategy, we instituted Daily Crime Briefings in which crime patterns, resources and strategies are reviewed in a proactive and real-time basis. More recently, we created new opportunities for residents to get involved in Policing for Prevention, including district Listservs and our Senior Citizen Police Academy.

My point is that Policing for Prevention is a dynamic strategy, and we are committed to continually look for ways to enhance community policing and improve our performance. In calendar year 2004, official UCR crimes in the District dropped by 18 percent, and preliminary data for 2005 are showing another 9 percent reduction.

A major milestone in that process took place in May 2004, when our Department completed the first major realignment of the PSA boundaries since they were implemented back in 1997. This realignment followed an extensive period of community dialogue and input from Councilmembers and other community leaders. The resulting boundaries reduced the total number of PSAs from 83 to 44. More importantly, the new boundaries united within the same PSA communities that had previously been split up among multiple PSAs. And in some cases, new district boundaries united communities of interest that had been split among different police districts – for example, several Northwest neighborhoods with significant numbers of Latino residents were brought together in the reconfigured Third District.

Since May 2004, we have continued to evaluate – and, when necessary, adjust – the PSA boundaries

to better support community policing. Shortly after the new boundaries were announced, we created an additional PSA in the Sixth District when it became clear that the original PSA was too large and diverse to support a single PSA. We are completing the same process in PSA 502, and will shortly be creating a new PSA in the Fifth District. So while our Department is committed to the principles behind the current PSA structure, we remain flexible in how best to implement community policing in our neighborhoods.

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In April 2005, approximately one year after the new PSA boundaries were implemented, the MPD's Office of Organizational Development completed a detailed analysis and evaluation of the PSA realignment. The full text of that evaluation report is posted on our website. The evaluation found that the realignment is generally meeting our goals, especially in the critical areas of crime fighting, response time and support for community policing. I am pleased to report to you today that crime in the District of Columbia is down – and down quite significantly – since the PSA boundaries were realigned. I am also pleased to report that Policing for Prevention is strong – and getting stronger since the boundary changes of last year.

Every PSA has received at least the minimum staffing level that we promised at the outset of the realignment, and most districts are at or above their targeted staffing. Most importantly, the PSAs with the greatest needs in terms of crime fighting have received the most officers. In other words, we are doing a much better job of aligning resources with crime-fighting needs. In fact, we have assigned almost 90 more police officers to the PSAs than our target of 1,787, which represents 5 percent more than our original analysis recommended. However, because some of these officers are unavailable for duty in the PSAs, the number of officers and supervisors actually working in the PSAs has fallen below the target. Addressing this challenge is something I will discuss a little later in my testimony.

One of the primary goals of the PSA realignment was to provide district commanders with the resources and flexibility to handle the full range of patrol responsibilities in the districts and PSAs: answering calls for service, engaging the community in community policing and problem solving, and responding to hot spots and other community crime priorities. The evidence suggests that the PSA realignment is helping us meet this goal.

For example, our analysis shows that response times have improved under the PSA realignment. During fiscal year 2005, we consistently exceeded our performance target of 8.2 minutes from the time of dispatch to the first officer arriving on the scene for Priority One calls. In April 2004, our average response time was 8.2 minutes for the fiscal year-to-date. In April 2005, it was down to 7.9 minutes, and in August of this year, it was approximately 7.8 minutes. These numbers indicate that early concerns about the larger size of the PSAs hurting response times have not materialized.

Our evaluation also found that the level of “PSA integrity” has improved over the past year. “PSA integrity” refers to the amount of time that officers actually spend on their assigned PSA, without having to be dispatched to calls for service in other PSAs. Prior to the realignment, approximately 58

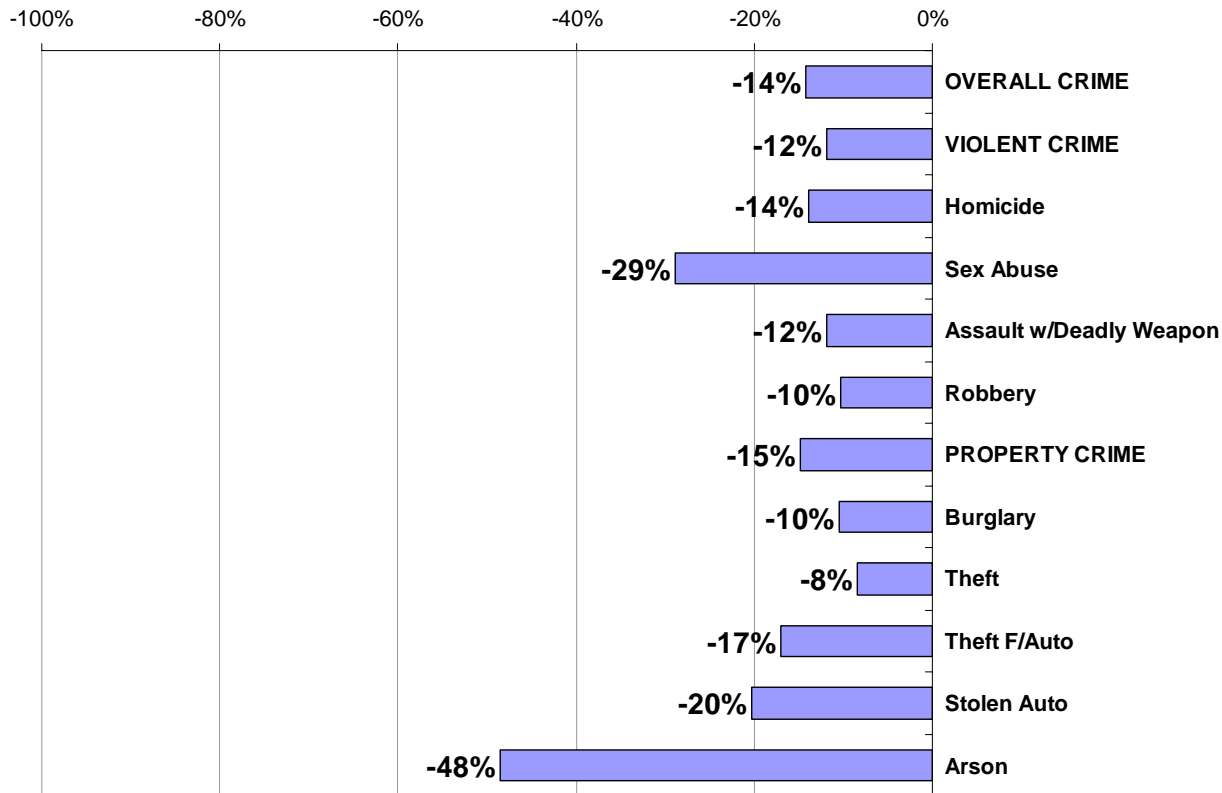
percent of all units that were dispatched were dispatched outside of their assigned PSA . Since the realignment, that percentage has been reduced to about 36 percent, and most of the “cross-dispatching” is now occurring for serious crimes for which time is critical or multiple units may be needed to respond. By improving PSA integrity, we are able to provide officers with more time and opportunity for community policing activities on their PSAs, and residents are being served by officers with whom they are familiar.

I believe the realignment has also helped to improve coordination with other government agencies – primarily through the ward Core Teams – and with the ward Councilmembers’ offices. We have also created new opportunities for residents to participate in Policing for Prevention. PSA meetings are being publicized more widely and more regularly, and in many areas, the meetings are better attended. As I mentioned earlier, we have also developed new communications and training resources for residents – Listservs, a citizen academy and the like. And we have formalized a mechanism – the PSA Action Plan – for the PSA teams to identify priorities, document strategies and share the results with the community.

Perhaps most importantly, the PSA realignment has contributed to an ongoing and significant reduction in crime in our city. In the 12 months immediately following implementation of the new boundaries, serious crime declined by more than 14 percent citywide, according to preliminary statistics. Violent crime fell almost 12 percent and property crime almost 15 percent during this time period. This trend has generally continued in recent months as well. The PSA realignment is not the only factor behind the downward trend in crime. But I firmly believe that the realignment put us in a stronger position to fight crime in our communities, and we have worked hard to take full advantage of that opportunity.

Of course, recent reductions in crime have been the result of more than just the PSA teams. It is important to remember that PSA efforts to fight crime are supported by a variety of other units and resources, including Focused Mission Teams, detectives, redeployed officers, Mobile Force and overtime details that we have authorized in each of the districts. It is this combination of resources – and the flexibility in deploying them – that have helped us to reduce crime in our designated “hot spots.” Since February of this year, overall crime in the hot spots is down 15 percent, about twice the decrease in crime citywide. We are also becoming more agile and effective at addressing special concerns and priorities in our neighborhoods, such as the recent rash of hotel robberies in Northwest, auto thefts in 6D (which are down 31 percent this year) and a persistent drug market in PSA 401, to name just a few examples.

### Percent Decrease in the Number of DC Code Index Crimes After the PSA Boundary Realignment



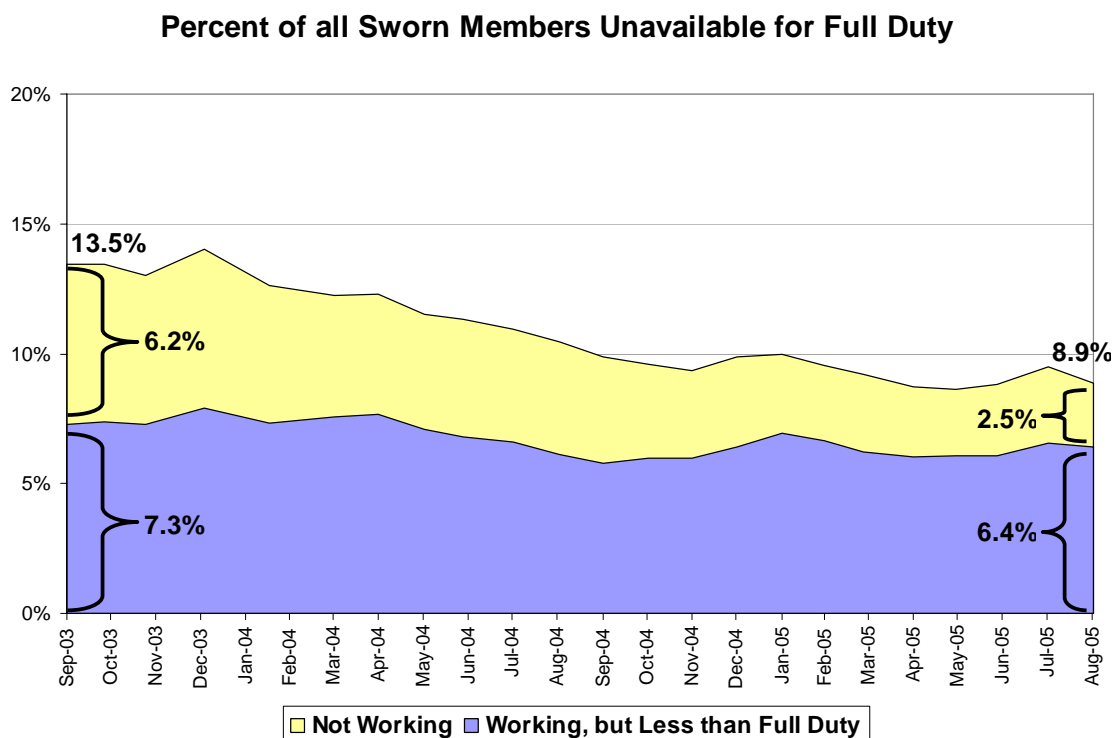
*Data covers the period of May 2, 2003-April 15, 2004 compared to May 2, 2004-April 15, 2005. Source: Violent Crimes Branch (VCB) homicide records as of 4/25/05. Geocoded Analytical Services Application (ASAP) preliminary DC Index crime data as of 4/22/05. These data do not represent official statistics submitted to the FBI under the Uniform Crime Reporting program (UCR). All preliminary offenses are coded based on DC criminal code and not the FBI offense classifications. All statistics are subject to change due to a variety of reasons, such as a change in classification, the determination that certain offense reports were unfounded, or late reporting. Any comparisons between MPD preliminary data and the official crime statistics published by the FBI under the Uniform Crime Reporting Program (UCR) are inaccurate and misleading.*

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While I am certainly pleased with the progress of our Policing for Prevention strategy and the results to date, I recognize that a number of challenges remain. Community policing will always be a work in progress, and we are committed to making improvements whenever and wherever we can.

One challenge is certainly officer availability – and, as a result, officer visibility. With the support of the Council and reform legislation you passed last year, our Department has been successful in reducing the overall percentage of sworn members unavailable for full-time duty from 14 percent to 9 percent. However, in the PSAs, close to 13 percent of our officers remain unavailable for full duty. Part of this can be explained by the fact that PSA assignments are more dangerous, and injuries and other situations more likely to occur. Nevertheless, we will continue to work at ensuring that officers who cannot return to full duty are given disability retirements as expeditiously as possible, so that

we can fill their positions with full-duty officers.



*“Unavailable for full duty” includes members who are not working as well as those who are working, but not in a full duty capacity. Members on military, administrative, or extended sick leave, or indefinite suspension, cannot work, whereas members in a limited duty or non-contact status can work in a limited capacity. Over the past two years, of every 10 members who were unavailable for full duty, five to seven members were working.*

Another area of concern voiced by many residents is what we call “continuity of assignment” – or the ability to keep an officer assigned to a particular PSA over a period of time. I recognize the value of maintaining officers who are familiar with their PSAs. But the community needs to understand that most officers who leave a PSA assignment choose to do so in the interest of advancing their careers – through a promotion or a specialized assignment they applied for. Periodically during “open season,” officers are also able to bid for more desirable shifts or days off, based on seniority. Staffing may then need to be realigned in a district in order to keep the shifts and days off balanced in the PSAs. Though continuity of assignment is important, the opportunity for career advancement and some flexibility in assignment is also important to our officers. During the most recent contract negotiations, my management team proposed creating a monetary incentive for members who remain in the PSAs, but the union supported other priorities. Depending upon the availability of funds, we do plan to provide bonuses for members of a few top-performing PSAs.

Two other challenges I see, as we move forward: further enhancing the supervision and leadership on the PSAs, and generating even greater community participation in Policing for Prevention. The realignment of the PSAs did allow us to put generally stronger leaders in charge of the smaller

number of PSAs we now have, and we have provided our PSA team leaders with additional training to support their roles. Still, I recognize that while PSA leadership is better than it was, it is still not where it should be in each and every PSA. I have instructed our district commanders to ensure that all PSA team members are being evaluated rigorously and fairly, and that members who are not performing are identified, counseled and, if necessary, replaced.

Finally, we need to work harder at increasing attendance and productivity at PSA meetings and other community policing events, including Advisory Neighborhood Commission meetings in which the PSAs participate. We are instituting steps to ensure that the PSA meetings we advertise are, in fact, being held, and that minutes and other follow-ups from the meetings are being captured – by community volunteers or others.

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I want to take just a few minutes to offer some comments on the Community Protection Act of 2005.

This legislation is certainly well-intentioned in many respects – hiring more police officers, enhancing their visibility and working to ensure the safety of our entertainment and other business districts. But while these goals are laudable, I do not believe this legislation is the best approach for achieving them.

One could certainly make the case for why the Metropolitan Police Department may need additional officers, but I am not sure we could justify – or adequately fund and support – an additional 1,600 officers at this time. Without a massive increase in the Department's budget – for both personnel and non-personnel expenses – I fear that such a large and sudden increase in our manpower might force us to cut in other critical areas. If there is consensus that our Department could benefit from additional officers over and above our current authorized strength of 3,800, then I believe the Mayor, the Council and the MPD should work together on determining an appropriate expansion number.

And if there are additional officers available at some point in the future, I believe the majority of them should be placed in our police districts and PSAs. Policing for Prevention makes district commanders ultimately responsible for community policing within their decentralized areas of command. And our commanders have developed generally good relationships with the communities they serve, in furtherance of our crime-fighting strategy. The bill now before the Committee seems to contradict a basic tenet of community policing, in that it would put additional resources intended for community policing in a new centralized unit that is not as close to, or as accountable to, the community, as the seven police districts are. Further, the bill would distribute additional resources evenly across wards. Our PSA realignment, as well as best practices in community policing, indicate that it makes more sense to put additional resources where they are needed most – that is, in our higher-crime communities.

Finally, I believe our existing PSA system provides the structure and the flexibility to address some of the underlying issues in the legislation. We have already established new foot patrol beats and expanded the use of bicycle patrols, where these tactics make sense. We will also be receiving more than 250 new mountain bikes over the next few months. But as attractive and popular as foot and

bike patrols may be, please keep in mind that they are not panaceas, and expanding them does not make sense in each and every community.

Similarly, I recognize that business and entertainment districts present unique challenges to the police and the community. We have worked within our existing PSA structure to try to meet those challenges, without having to take resources away from other communities that have other crime prevention priorities. For large venues or events, we have found that the use of reimbursable overtime details makes the most sense, so that the costs of these events are paid by the business and people participating in them. We will continue to pursue this approach in other areas of the city.

Our Department is, of course, open to new ideas and suggestions on how we can achieve the goals of this legislation in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible. We look forward to working with the Committee and the Council on further enhancing our community policing model, but we respectfully disagree with the approach contained in this particular bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present this opening statement. My staff and I would be happy to address any questions you may have.